

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous
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Abundant Grace

I found an old story, told many times in many different ways, that teaches an important truth. An old man sits at the entrance to a town. One day a stranger asked him, “What are the people in this town like?” “What kind of people lived in the town you came from?” asked the old man. “In the town I just came from,” answered the stranger, “the people were kind, generous, and honest. They were wonderful people.” “You’ll find the people in this town to also be wonderful,” said the old man.

A few hours later, another stranger asked the old man, “What are the people in this town like?” “What kind of people lived in the town you came from?” asked the old man. “In the town I just came from,” answered the stranger, “the people were cheats and robbers. They were terrible people.” “You’ll find the people in this town to also be terrible,” said the old man.

We see with the eyes of our hearts. If love is in our hearts, we see love. If hatred and hurt are in our hearts, we see hatred and hurt. This may seem too easy to be true, but I believe our own experiences tell us the wisdom of it.

I know, for example, that when I am critical of something or someone—even justifiably—the criticism begins to take on a life of its own, seeping into other parts of my conversations and forming my opinions in ways I wouldn’t consciously choose. When the criticism begins to seep into

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR



other parts of my thoughts and actions, it becomes not a judgment on another person, but rather an expression of who I am.

The same is true when I praise something or someone. The praise and joy I express begin to take on a life of their own, seeping into other parts of my conversations and forming my opinions in ways I wouldn’t consciously choose. When the praise and the joy begin to seep into the other parts of my thoughts and actions, they become not a judgment on another person, but rather an expression of who I am.

GIVE GOD SOMETHING TO WORK WITH

During April, as we celebrate the feast of Easter we're reminded that as members of the Body of Christ we have been challenged by the Lord to be people of peace, joy, hope, and forgiveness. We are to be people inspired by the Holy Spirit, molded more and more each day into witnesses of the kingdom of God.

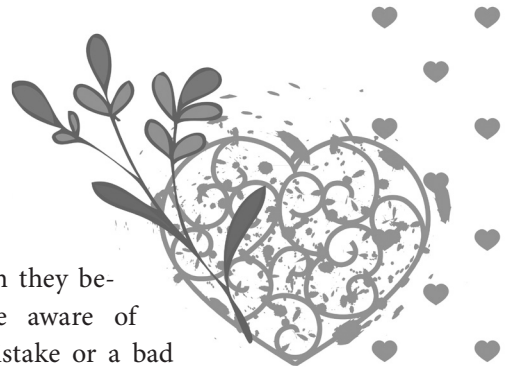
This molding by the Holy Spirit is a powerful activity—the generous gift of sanctifying grace in our lives—but it demands our cooperation. Even God, even the power of the Holy Spirit, needs something to work with. We need to cooperate with the grace that has been freely offered us so we see and understand in ways the world might not easily embrace or recognize as important and essential.

Even when we have the best intentions, even when we find the challenge of the Spirit of the Lord and expectations of Jesus to be very appealing and something we want to be part of, even when we hope for good, each of us must honestly acknowledge that we are sometimes not conduits of God's praise and joy.

We acknowledge this not to punish ourselves, not to feel guilty, not to judge ourselves, not to be critical of who we are—but simply to acknowledge and accept who we are. With each acknowledgment of choices and actions that don't build up the Body of Christ, we rebound with another choice or action that *does* build up the Body.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

Recall the friends and disciples of Jesus. When we reflect on their lives, as we are called to do during Easter season, we hear that even these wonderful people needed to be open to change and improvement. Even the apostles weren't capable of making the best choices and decisions all the time. But



when they became aware of a mistake or a bad judgment, they took steps to repair the damage.

In these days and weeks between Easter and the Pentecost, let each of us commit ourselves to being open to the Spirit of God working in our lives. If we have been critical or judgmental or harsh in our choices or actions, we ask the Lord to gently fill us with patience and kindness and love. Let the peace and joy of Christ reign in our hearts and fill us with his life and power.

Members of SA must begin this reflection within our own hearts by taking the time to examine how we perceive ourselves. Many members of our group have long-held, very harsh judgments about their personal shortcomings. We extend compassion and understanding with incredible patience and fortitude toward others, but we are reluctant or unable to extend the same compassion and understanding to ourselves. We hold ourselves to a higher standard, perhaps a standard that is unapproachable and that will guarantee we will always come up short.

This Easter, let our celebration extend God's mercy, compassion, and grace into all the crevices of our lives. As we experience the abundant grace of God, we share that grace with others and are nourished with that same grace, confident that we please God and walk with the Spirit of God every day.



Defiant Daughters

The following is adapted from *Defiant Daughters: Christian Women of Conscience* by Marcy Heidish (Liguori Publications © 2010).

It has always been more difficult for women to break out of conventional expectations and claim their own place in the larger scheme of things than it has been for men. And yet, against long odds, many did. It is notable that in spiritual contexts, such women have often been seen as mental cases, misfits, menaces, menopausal harpies, or all of the above.

Misunderstood or not, they persevered. They faced, weighed, and decided each question of conscience. Such choices are exemplified by the cross itself, the center of Christian faith for two thousand years.

Women were faithful followers of Jesus all the way to Calvary and beyond. Women discovered the empty tomb of the resurrection. Women, as apostles, deacons, and converts, turned their homes into the earliest Christian churches even during times of severe persecution by the state.

Mystics and martyrs, reformers and rebels, protectors and preachers, many of these women lived in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Some gave up lives of comfort for a sense of calling; others bore burdens rather than betray comrades. They were Catholic, Protestant, Quaker, and Orthodox.

Whatever their differences, they were all in close communion with God—and they all faced some sort of spiritual dilemma.

The Christian tradition, then, is deeply enriched by those “defiant daughters” who lived the Gospel to a radical, risk-taking degree. In the words of Ita Ford, a Maryknoll sister martyred in El Salvador, “We keep plugging along here, because life is threatened by other evils worse than death—hatred, vengeance, and selfishness.”



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

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Q *I have a friend who prays each Sunday at Mass to die and go to heaven. If she commits suicide, will she go to purgatory? If so, for how long? What happens to souls in purgatory? Will she ever get into heaven? Are there levels where souls in purgatory are alone, with no friends or family?*

A This person, it seems to me, is you. Your question and the details you seek are part of a convoluted process you're using to determine whether your earthly suffering is worth it. If the number of years you would spend in purgatory or the quality of life in purgatory seems to be more bearable than your current life, you might consider that to be an argument in favor of the action you contemplate. So I'm sorry, but I wouldn't answer your question even if I could.

I understand that you're in great pain and are burdened by life. What you need is a relationship, another voice to speak to you with love and understanding, especially when you feel depressed and alone.

A trained therapist is the obvious choice, and I strongly suggest you seek professional help. Your depression can be significantly reduced with the correct therapeutic response.

You'll be amazed at how much better you can feel. You'll be amazed at the improvement in your perceptions about yourself and your life.

Your sickness is robbing you of this kind of peace. Seek professional help now and stop trying to figure out what purgatory would mean for you. That is the wrong question for you at this time.



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